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APPLICATION
FOR
UNITED STATES
LETTERS PATENT

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For: APPARATUS AND METHOD OF INPUTTING
FINGERPRINTS
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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

A person can be identified through fingerprint authentication. A fingerprint input apparatus is used for fingerprint authentication. The fingerprint input apparatus has a fingerprint reading function and the function of verifying a read fingerprint against a previously-registered fingerprint. A fingerprint sensor realizes the fingerprint reading function. The fingerprint sensor is pressed by a finger of a user to read the fingerprint thereof. When the acquired fingerprint matches with a registered fingerprint, the fingerprint verification is established. When the acquired fingerprint does not match with the registered fingerprint, the fingerprint verification is not established.

20 The technique related to the fingerprint input apparatus is disclosed in Japanese Patent Publication No. 2949007, JP-A No. 272886/1986, JP-A No. 225345/1993, and JP-A No. 161491/1996.

An improper press of a finger against the fingerprint
25 sensor causes an erroneous fingerprint reading of the

fingerprint sensor. Moreover, a failure due to moisture on a finger causes an erroneous fingerprint reading of the fingerprint sensor. An occurrence of a fingerprint reading failure results in degradation in the accuracy of fingerprint verification. When the accuracy of fingerprint verification decreases, the fingerprint verification becomes a non-established state even in the inputting of a correct fingerprint. When a significant failure in fingerprint reading occurs, the fingerprint authentication process may not be activated. In such a case, a user has to require a countermeasure against the cause of the fingerprint reading failure.

INS 21 When a failure in fingerprint reading occurs, the conventional fingerprint input apparatus issues an alarm of a failure occurrence or displays re-execution of fingerprint reading. However, the conventional fingerprint input apparatus does not notify a user of the cause of an occurrence of a fingerprint reading failure. When a user recognizes the occurrence of a fingerprint reading failure, he cleans the finger and changes the position on which the finger is pressed against the fingerprint sensor. This operation is performed coping with the cause of a fingerprint reading failure assumed by the user. That is, the user must take a countermeasure without recognizing the cause of a fingerprint reading failure.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

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In the fingerprint input apparatus according to the present invention, the fingerprint analyzer (3) comprises a quality evaluation and processing section (32) for performing the analysis based on the image quality and/or feature points of a fingerprint image represented by the fingerprint image data; and an evaluation result display and processing section (33) for driving the evaluation result display (2) based on the evaluation result.

In the fingerprint input apparatus defined according to the present invention, the quality evaluation and processing section (32) performs the analysis based on any one of the density of the fingerprint image, a fingerprint display area indicated by the fingerprint image, the shape of ridges indicated by the fingerprint image, and the position of a spiral shape indicated by the fingerprint image.

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In the fingerprint input apparatus according to the present invention, the evaluation result display (2) includes a display panel for visually displaying the evaluation result.

5 In the fingerprint input apparatus according to the present invention, the evaluation result display includes an acoustic device for acoustically displaying the evaluation result.

Moreover, according to the present invention, a
10 fingerprint input method comprises the steps of reading a fingerprint and then outputting fingerprint image data corresponding to the fingerprint; analyzing the quality of a fingerprint image represented by the fingerprint image data and creating an evaluation result representing the
15 cause of the quality failure and/or a countermeasure against the cause when the analysis result indicates a quality failure; and displaying the evaluation result.

In the above description, numerals with parentheses
20 are respectively attached to technical matters. The numerals respectively correspond to reference numerals attached to the technical matters configuring at least one specific mode or plural embodiments of the present invention, particularly, to the technical matters
25 expressed in drawings corresponding to the mode or

embodiments. The reference numerals clarify the correspondences between technical matters in claims and technical matters in embodiments or embodiments. It should be noted that the correspondence does not means that the technical matters in claims are restrictively construed as those in mode or embodiments.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

This and other objects, features and advantages of the present invention will become more apparent upon a reading of the following detailed description and drawings, in which:

Fig. 1 is a block diagram illustrating a fingerprint input apparatus according to an embodiment of the present invention; and

Fig. 2 is a flowchart for the fingerprint input apparatus according to an embodiment of the present invention.

DESCRIPTION OF THE EMBODIMENTS

Fig. 1 is a diagram illustrating a fingerprint input apparatus according to an embodiment of the present invention. Referring to Fig. 1, the fingerprint input apparatus 10 includes a fingerprint sensor 1, an evaluation result display 2, and a fingerprint analyzer 3. The fingerprint analyzer 3 includes an image capture and processing section 31, a quality evaluation and processing

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an occurrence of a fingerprint reading failure and detection results.

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24 } The evaluation result display and processing section 33 drives the evaluation result display 2 based on notification content of the quality evaluation and processing section 32. When receiving a notification on detection of a blurred image, the evaluation result display and processing section 33 lights light emitting diodes corresponding to a message indicating an increase in moisture of a finger. When receiving a notification on detection of a lacked area of an image, the evaluation result display and processing section 33 lights light emitting diodes indicating an increase in the push pressure of a finger. When receiving an excessive dense of an image, the evaluation result display and processing section 33 lights light emitting diodes corresponding to a message indicating a decrease in moisture and a decrease in push pressure of a finger.

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25 } The image quality evaluation and processing section 32 transfers image data to the fingerprint authentication and processing section 34 when the quality of image data is good. The fingerprint authentication and processing section 34 extracts feature points from a fingerprint image indicating image data. The feature point means the shape of ridges of a fingerprint or the shape of a spiral

indicating the center of a fingerprint. The fingerprint authentication and processing section 34 analyzes whether or not a spiral shape is roughly positioned at the center of a fingerprint image. When the spiral shape is not roughly positioned at the center of a fingerprint image or cannot be detected, the fingerprint authentication and processing section 34 judges that the feature points are fault. The fingerprint authentication and processing section 34 notifies the evaluation result display and processing section 33 of an occurrence of a feature point failure and of detection results.

The evaluation result display and processing section 33 drives the evaluation result display 2 based on the notification content of the fingerprint authentication and processing section 34. When accepting a notification on a feature point failure (a shift of the center of a spiral fingerprint), the evaluation result display and processing section 33 lights light emitting diodes corresponding to a message indicating a change of the position at which the finger is pressed.

When the feature points are normally extracted, the fingerprint authentication and processing section 34 verifies a fingerprint image indicated by image data against a previously registered fingerprint image. When detecting a match, the fingerprint authentication and

processing section 34 approves the entered fingerprint.
When detecting a mismatch, the fingerprint authentication
and processing section 34 denies the entered fingerprint.

The operation of the fingerprint input apparatus 10 of
the present invention will be explained in detail with
reference to Fig. 2. Fig. 2 shows the operation of the
fingerprint input apparatus of the present invention. The
image capture and processing section 31 drives the
fingerprint sensor 1 and then acquires the fingerprint
image (step S101). The image capture and processing
section 31 implements to the fingerprint image a
preliminary process including a binarizing process, a
background cancellation process, a noise cancellation
process, a line segment extraction process, a deficit
backup process, and others (step S102). This preliminary
process may be partially omitted. Otherwise, another
process may be added to the preliminary process. The
fingerprint image conducted to the preliminary process of
the image capture and processing section 31 is formed of
information representing ridges of a fingerprint. The
quality evaluation and processing section 32 refers to the
fingerprint image created by the image capture and
processing section 31 and analyzes the area of a
fingerprint and the continuity of the ridge, thus
evaluating the quality of the fingerprint image (step

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S103).

5 ^{IAS 26} When detecting that the image is too thin (e.g. blur
due to lack of density or shortage in area), the quality
evaluation and processing section 32 notifies the
evaluation result display and processing section 33 of the
detection result. The evaluation result display and
processing section 33 instructs the evaluation result
display 2 to light the red light emitting diodes (step
10 S105). On the evaluation result display 2, red light
emitting diodes correspond to a message indicating an
increase in moisture of a finger and an increase in
pressure by a finger. The user, which has recognized the
lighting of the red light emitting diodes, can adjust the
moisture of a finger and the pressure by the finger.

15 ^{IAS 27} When detecting that the image is too dense (including
a defaced image due to excessive density), the quality
evaluation and processing section 32 notifies the
evaluation result display and processing section 33 of the
detection result. The evaluation result display and
20 processing section 33 instructs the evaluation result
display 2 to light the yellow light emitting diodes (step
S106). On the evaluation result display 2, the red light
emitting diodes correspond to a message indicating a
decrease in moisture of a finger, a decrease in pressure
25 by a finger, and a change of the center position thereof.

The user, which has recognized the lighting of the yellow light emitting diodes, can adjust the moisture of a finger and a pressure by the finger.

5 ¹⁰⁵ When the density of an image is good, the quality evaluation and processing section 32 extracts feature points of a fingerprint image. When a defect of feature points is detected, the quality evaluation and processing section 32 instructs the evaluation result display 2 to light, for example, the red light emitting diodes and the 10 yellow light emitting diodes. On the evaluation result display 2, the simultaneous lighting of red and yellow light emitting diodes correspond to a message indicating a change of the position at which a finger presses. The user, which has recognized the simultaneous lighting of the red- 15 and yellow light emitting diodes, can adjust the pressing position of the finger. A defect of feature points means that the spiral shape is shifted from the center of the image or that the amount of information regarding the shape of ridges is insufficient.

20 When the quality of a fingerprint image is good, the image capture and processing section 31 notifies the evaluation result display and processing section 33 of the detection result and then transfers the fingerprint image to the fingerprint authentication and processing section 25 34.

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removal may be suitably made to the evaluation content if the fingerprint reading accuracy does not decrease or increases. The fingerprint sensor 1 is not limited to only the combination of a light source and an image pickup device. The fingerprint sensor 1 may be of a semiconductor electrostatic capacitance detection element array. The fingerprint sensor 1 may be of a semiconductor field-strength detection element array. The fingerprint sensor 1 may include a natural-light source. The fingerprint sensor 1 may include an optical detection element array, instead of an image pickup device.

According to present invention, the fingerprint input apparatus specifies the failure cause when a fingerprint reading failure occurs and then issues an instruction for removing the cause. For that reason, it can be avoided that a user may take an inadequate countermeasure or no countermeasures.

Moreover, the present invention can decrease the possibility that authentication may be denied even in a correct fingerprint reading operation of a user. That is, the authentication rejection rate (personal identification refusal rate) can be provided.

Moreover, according to the present invention, the fingerprint input apparatus can avoid that a user may be embarrassed by a reading failure cause. The user can be

released from unpleasantness caused by authentication failure or by the cause of authentication failure that cannot be grasped.

Moreover, according to the present invention, the fingerprint input apparatus can avoid that when a reading failure occurs, a user may take unnecessary countermeasures or no countermeasures. In other words, it is possible to shorten the processing period between the fingerprint reading operation and the fingerprint authentication process.

The entire disclosure of Japanese Patent Application No. 11-347419 filed on December 7, 1999 including specification, claims, drawing and summary are incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

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